

# NEWS AND NOTES FOR FLORIDA VETERANS

Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office  
St. Petersburg, FL

November 2004



The "News and Notes for Florida Veterans" is published monthly by the Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg, Florida, to provide information on VA benefit programs to veterans and dependents in Florida. The material presented does not have the effect of laws or regulations. Please send questions or comments on this newsletter to Veterans Service Center, ATTN: "News and Notes," PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731. We do not have the resources to maintain a mailing list for distribution to individuals; however this newsletter is available on the St. Petersburg VA Regional Office web site at [www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete](http://www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete).

## **THE ANNUAL COST OF LIVING ADJUSTMENT (COLA)**

effective December 1, 2004, will be 2.7 percent. The increase will appear in payments due on December 31, 2004, for the month of December. VA benefits are increased by the same percentage as the percentage by which benefit amounts payable under Social Security are increased effective December 1, 2004, based on the Consumer Price Index.

**VA HONORS TAMPA PAIN TEAM** (VA News Release)  
WASHINGTON – Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony J. Principi today presented the Chronic Pain and Rehabilitation Program in Tampa with the highest honors given by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for programs assisting combat-injured veterans. Specifically cited by the Secretary were clinical director Dr. Michael E. Clark, coordinator of the chronic pain program Susan J. Hagan, and clinical psychologist Dr. Ronald J. Gironda, all employees of the James A. Haley VA Medical Center in Tampa. "Through their devoted and innovative pursuit of the most effective ways to relieve – if not eliminate – chronic pain, they have improved the lives of veterans and, in fact, all Americans," Secretary Principi said.

The team received the 2004 Olin Teague Award, given by VA for 24 years for "extraordinary contributions by VA employees in the rehabilitation and improvement in the quality of life for war-injured veterans." The award is named after the late Rep. Olin Teague, who represented Texas' sixth district in Congress for 32 years. A highly decorated World War II veteran, he served for 18 years as chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Committee. He retired in 1978 and died in 1981.

**BENEFITS FOR EX-POWS EXPANDED** (VA News Release) WASHINGTON – Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony J. Principi announced that benefits will be expanded to all former POWs with strokes and common heart diseases. "This is an issue that has been studied and debated too long," Secretary Principi said. "We have scientific studies supporting the association of these illnesses to the military service of our former POWs." The secretary announced the new benefits in a speech at a national convention of the American Ex-Prisoners of War.

The Administration's decision benefits former POWs with strokes and most heart diseases. Those veterans will be automatically eligible for disability compensation for those common ailments, and their spouses and dependents will be eligible for service-connected survivors' benefits if these diseases contribute to the death of a former POW. The Administration's new decision will add to the list of 16 medical problems that VA presumes to be linked to the military service of former POWs. The new rules will take effect on October 7, 2004.

In September 2003, Secretary Principi launched a nationwide outreach effort to identify and provide benefits to the estimated 11,000 former POWs who were not receiving VA disability compensation or other services. There are about 35,000 living ex-POWs. The secretary also has urged Congress to change federal law that required that former POWs must be detained for at least 30 days to qualify for the full range of POW benefits.

**VA ANNOUNCES HOMELESS PROGRAM AWARD IN FLORIDA** (VA Press Release) WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) identified a recipient in Florida to share in approximately \$31 million in grants as part of VA's Homeless Providers Grant and Per Diem Program. The Florida grant goes to the Agency for Community Treatment Services of Tampa for a program for homeless women veterans.

Thirty-nine programs in 17 states and the District of Columbia have been named to share \$18 million in grants. These first-time "special needs" grants will assist non-profit and faith-based organizations providing services to homeless veterans who are women, caretakers of minor children, elderly, terminally ill or who have a chronic mental illness.

In addition, VA is providing nearly \$13 million to medical centers to enhance collaboration with the grant recipients assisting those specific homeless populations. VA is also providing grants to community-based agencies in eight states for renovations needed to improve safety of veterans as identified in the Life Safety Codes of the National Fire Protection Association.

## **VA TAKES RECRUITING CAMPAIGN TO COMPUTER DESKTOPS** (VA News Release) WASHINGTON –

Expecting high employee retirement rates over the next few years, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has stepped up its search for qualified people with a bold promotional product. VA has created a new CD-ROM promoting the department as “an employer of choice.” Developed by VA’s Marketing and Veterans Employment Outreach Service, the mini-CD-ROM uses graphics and video streaming to present a wide spectrum of career opportunities. The CD-ROM describes VA’s goals and services, occupations and the benefits of working for VA. The new marketing tool supports the objectives of the President’s Management Agenda and VA’s 2003-2008 Strategic Plan. Last month the department sent the disc to colleges and universities, military transition centers, veterans organizations, and VA vocational rehabilitation centers, offices and medical centers. A limited number of CDs are available by contacting the Office of Human Resources Management and Labor Relations, Office of Marketing and Veterans Employment Outreach Service, at (202) 273-9740. Current VA job openings may be found at [www.usajobs.opm.gov](http://www.usajobs.opm.gov).

**VA SECRETARY NAMED “PERSON OF THE YEAR” BY HOSPICE GROUP** (VA News Release) WASHINGTON – Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony J. Principi received the “Person of the Year” award from the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization at its annual conference here on Sept. 30. The National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization is the oldest and largest nonprofit membership organization representing end-of-life programs and professionals in the United States. The annual award honors a hospice advocate for raising public awareness about end-of-life care. The organization cited the secretary’s strong leadership, support and commitment to hospice and palliative care.

Palliative care is a critical mission for VA. VA hospice care helps make the remaining days of veterans with terminal conditions as comfortable as possible. In the past three years, VA has taken numerous steps to enhance hospice care, including: making hospice and palliative care available to all enrolled patients; establishing palliative care teams in all VA hospitals and increasing staff training; setting VA policy for the purchase of comprehensive hospice services in communities; making home hospice care a separately listed request in VA’s annual budget; creating dedicated hospice program positions in VA’s Office of Geriatrics and Extended Care; and forming partnerships in states to strengthen collaboration between VA facilities and hospice agencies.

## **IMPORTANT DATES IN NOVEMBER**

**November 1** payments for October due

**November 4** last day to input change of address or establish direct deposit on compensation and pension awards in time for the 12-10-2004 payments

**November 11** Federal Holiday - Veterans Day

**November 16** last day to change or cancel direct deposit on compensation and pension awards in time for the 12-01-2004 payments

**November 25** Federal Holiday - Thanksgiving

## **VA FACILITIES ADDRESSES AND TELEPHONE NUMBERS:**

**VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg** - PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731 **1-800-827-1000**

**Regional Processing Office, Atlanta, GA** (education claims) - PO Box 100022, Decatur, GA 30031-7022  
**1-888-GIBILL1 (442-4551)**  
Telephone number for Chapter 30 self-verifications  
**1-877-823-2378**

**Veterans Health Administration Toll-Free Hotline** (medical care) - **1-877-222-8387**

**VA EFT Information Hotline** (electronic funds transfer - direct deposit) **1-877-838-2778**

**VA Insurance Center, Philadelphia** (VA Insurance) - PO Box 42954, Philadelphia, PA 19101 **1-800-669-8477**

**VA Health Administration Center** (CHAMPVA and Spina Bifida health care) -  
CHAMPVA inquiries: PO Box 65023, Denver, CO 80206-5023  
CHAMPVA claims: PO Box 65024, Denver, CO 80206-5024  
Spina Bifida inquiries and claims: PO Box 65025, Denver, CO 80206-5025 **1-800-733-8387**

**Foreign Medical Program Office** (medical treatment abroad) -  
PO Box 65021, Denver, CO 80206-5021 **303-331-7590**

**National Cemeteries**  
10,000 Bay Pines Blvd N, Bay Pines FL **727-398-9426**  
6502 SW 102nd Ave, Bushnell FL 33513 **352-793-7740**  
Naval Air Station, Pensacola FL **850-453-4108/4846**

**National Cemetery Administration Office of Memorial Programs** (headstones and markers) - 810 Vermont Ave NW, Washington, DC 20420 **1-800-697-6947**

**Loan Guaranty Eligibility Center** (certificates of eligibility)  
PO Box 20729, Winston-Salem, NC 27120  
**1-888-244-6711**

**Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) Unit** -  
Chicago VA Regional Office **1-800-829-4833**

## **INTERNET SITES OF INTEREST:**

VA Web Site: [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov)

VA Web Automated Reference Materials System (WARMS)  
<http://www.warms.vba.va.gov/>

Property Management [www.ocwen.com](http://www.ocwen.com)

Florida Department of Veterans Affairs:  
[www.floridavets.org/](http://www.floridavets.org/)

St. Pete Regional Office: [www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete](http://www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete)

